



BOTTOM LINE

The Electronic Newsletter of The Blaenavon Heritage Railway January 2021



Welcome to the first issue of the new electronic issue of Bottom Line. It is intended to publish this newsletter bi-monthly commencing January 2021. If you wish to receive the newsletter by email then please click the subscribe button on our website at <https://www.bhrailway.co.uk/>

Bottom line is published by the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society.

Edited by; Steve Thomas & Martin Herbert

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The Society manages and staffs the Railway Shop, 33 Broad Street, Blaenavon, NP4 9ND and Eric's Emporium located at the Furnace Sidings Station. All profits from the shop, the emporium and other fundraising activities support the Blaenavon Heritage Railway. Telephone 01495 792263

Email: shop@pbrly.co.uk

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Steve Thomas,

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The Company is responsible for all aspects of the operational side of the railway including locomotives, rolling stock, buildings, stations, track and future developments. The railway is staffed entirely by a loyal band of volunteers and is overseen by a board of directors who are elected and co-opted by the membership.

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Alex Gourlay and Alex Hinshelwood

Uniform Grades Inspector: Philip Tiley

Diesel Inspector: Matthew Thomas



Cover photo: 'Rosyth' with the newly refurbished coaches at Blaenavon High Level
Photo above: 'Rosyth' September 2020
(photos by Steve Thomas)

The Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company (1983) Ltd

is a not-for-profit, volunteer-run charity.

Charity registration number: 514809.

Registered address:

33 Broad Street, Blaenavon, Torfaen, NP4 9ND

Facebook and website links:

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<https://www.facebook.com/pbrailway>

<https://www.bhrailway.co.uk/>

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Model Railway Club

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/PandBMRC>

<https://www.bhrailway.co.uk/model-railway-club>

Support us by becoming a member.

Blaenavon's Heritage Railway is supported by approximately 400 members who. By paying a small annual subscription they help keep the railway running for future generations to enjoy.

Benefits:

In addition to helping to preserve our railway, members enjoy a range of exclusive benefits and opportunities. These include:

Up 50% off ticket prices on normal (i.e. non-event) running days.

A 5% discount on purchases from

Eric's Emporium and The Railway Shop

Receiving our Top Line in-house magazine, with the latest news, photographs and articles
The regular Bottom Line newsletter.

An invite to our exclusive members evenings, with delicious food and drink, entertainment and trains!

Becoming a member is also essential to becoming a volunteer at the railway, and many members go on to undertake a range of voluntary activities with us! However, even if you do not wish to become a volunteer, by becoming a member you will be helping us to preserve and maintain our railway for future generations to enjoy!

How to join:

Those wishing to become a member may join either the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company or the supporting Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society.

Membership of the Company is open to British nationals aged 18 and over and affords the widest range of benefits. This the recommended route for eligible adults to become involved, granting the greatest range of privileges and opportunities. Others, including foreign nationals and young persons under the age of 18, may join the Society.

Annual membership prices:

Annual membership prices are currently as follows:

Adult Company membership: **£15.00**

Adult Society membership: **£15.00**

Joint adult membership (Company or Society): **£23.00**

Society membership for under 18s: **£7.50**

Lifetime membership prices:

We also offer the opportunity to become a lifetime member of the railway for a onetime payment. The current prices are:

Lifetime individual membership: **£300.00**

Lifetime joint membership: **£525.00**

Become a member online!

We are currently finalising a brand-new online membership application process. In the meantime, please [click here to download a membership form](#). You will need a PDF reader installed on your device to open the file.

Purchase online membership or renew membership.

<https://www.bhrailway.co.uk/onlinestore>

Please send completed membership forms to the below address, enclosing a cheque for the appropriate fee.

Membership Department

The Railway Shop,

33 Broad Street,

Blaenavon,

Pontypool,

Torfaen

NP4 9ND

Alternatively, you can take your form to Eric's Emporium or The Railway Shop for processing. Memberships can be paid by both cash and card at both locations.

Membership terms and conditions:

The terms and conditions of membership are outlined on our website.

<https://www.bhrailway.co.uk/membership>

STEAM RETURNS TO BLAENAVON.

On Saturday 29th August 2020, Blaenavon once again echoed to the sound of steam as our railway reopened following the extended closure forced by the COVID-19 pandemic. At eleven o'clock sharp, the first public train in eight months left Furnace Sidings, beginning a fifty-minute round trip through the stunning Welsh landscape. Over the following three days we went on to welcome 90 families/extended bubbles from near and far, with many other passers-by stopping to watch and wave at trains.

The reopening marked a triumphant moment for our team. In early March 2020, we were busy preparing to reopen to the public following the annual winter closure. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating, we took the decision to postpone the start of this year's running season. This was before the introduction of lockdown restrictions, and when these came into effect in late March we were forced to close for the foreseeable future.

Over the following months, there were very real fears about how much longer the railway could afford to remain closed. Heritage railways aren't cheap to run, and we have many background costs to pay regardless of whether we are running trains or not.

Thankfully, we had the very generous support of the public on our side. Through our COVID-19 Appeal, they raised nearly £3,500 to help the railway survive, and this was later supplemented by a £10,000 business recovery grant from the Welsh Government.

As restrictions began to be eased our volunteers started preparation work to reopen the railway once again. After countless hours of work both behind the scenes and on the ground, we were finally ready to reopen at the end of August 2020.

STEAM RETURNS TO BLAENAVON.

As a testament to our volunteer's hard work, we achieved the 'Good to Go'/'Barod Amdani' mark from Visit Britain/Visit Wales for our new social distancing and hygiene provisions. After a weekend of crew refresher runs on the 22nd/23rd August, we were finally ready to reopen on the following Saturday.

Tickets for the first day sold out quickly. To mark the occasion, we were fortunate enough to be joined by Lynne Neagle, Welsh Senedd Member for Torfaen. After inspecting our new social distancing and hygiene Ms. Neagle congratulated our volunteers for their hard work and determination to get the railway running again, wishing us the very best of success for the future.

After one of the most challenging periods in our railway's history, we re-opened with steam services running on Saturdays throughout September, 2020, all scheduled trains hauled by 106-year-old 'Rosyth No.1'.

You can find out more by visiting <https://www.bhrailway.co.uk/booktickets>

Thank you for all your support over the last few months, and welcome back to Blaenavon.

(submitted by Jamie Warner)



Rusty rails at Glantorfaen Crossing
Photo Jamie Warner July 2020

Carriage Shed (Steve Vincent)

It's finished! We have finally achieved a very major milestone!

The last siding in the new carriage shed has finally had the excess infill removed, levelled and chippings laid on the walkways. This only leaves a bit of tidying up, completion of infill between sidings outside and a footpath to the side door to finally complete a major project for the railway.

The shed is a valuable addition to the railway infrastructure as it will enable us to keep our carriages under cover, something that is imperative given the location of the railway. Winter in Blaenavon can be very harsh and the protection the shed will mean that our refurbished carriages will remain in good condition for a longer period than if they were stored outside.



Coach stock



Three of our carriages have recently undergone refurbishment at Williton on the West Somerset Railway. Finished in carmine and cream livery these compartment carriages allowed the railway to recommence public running services as they enabled 'social bubbles' during the recent pandemic.



Pontypool & Blaenavon Model Railway Club

The model railway club normally meets in two Portacabins in the shed complex area of Furnace Sidings on Tuesdays 11am – 3pm and also Fridays 7.00pm – 9.30pm. New members, regardless of age or experience are welcome.

The club has a number of operational layouts in both DCC and Analogue in N, OO9, OO, O gauge two of which are of exhibition standard and can be viewed at various model railway exhibitions in the South Wales/West Country areas.

In order to belong to the model railway club members must belong to either the Heritage Railway Company or the supporting Railway Society. The club currently has members whose ages range from 8 to over 70.

Future plans for the railway club include the building of a permanent club base adjoining the Furnace Sidings station, this will enable the club to develop further.



Photo courtesy of Steve Flint, Railway Modeller Magazine. ©

There were mixed fortunes for the Model Railway Club in 2020 due to meetings being cancelled due to COVID19. As space is limited within the club cabins it would be impossible to maintain recommended social distances. Coupled with possible contamination through shared use of tools, controllers etc. made it impossible for meeting to continue in a safe manner.



The club's main layout, 'Stonebridge Junction' attracted national fame when it was featured over six pages in the August 2020 edition of 'Railway Modeller'.

Following publication numerous requests were received from people all over the U.K. for membership details and acceptance to the club's Facebook page. PECO, who are the publishers of the magazine have extended an invitation for club members to visit their factory and retail attractions at Pecorama, Beer, Dorset in the summer of 2021. A visit to Dapol in Chirk is also being planned for 2021.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/PandBMRC>
steve.thomas@pbrly.co.uk

Submitted by Steve Thomas

THE RAILWAY SHOP

33, Broad Street, Blaenavon, Torfaen, NP4 9NF. Telephone 01495 792263

Stockists of all major manufacturers including Bachmann, Dapol, Hornby, Oxford.



Railway Shop

The Railway Shop is managed by the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway Society and profits from sales in the shop support the work of the Heritage Railway.

Well, 2020 has been a funny year, hasn't it? Little did we know, 12 months ago, how the year would pan out and as far as the shop has been concerned (along with everyone else) it has been a roller-coaster ride. We have endured 2 lockdowns with the shop closed and outside those times we have been opening fewer days in the week, to ensure that our volunteers can man the shop reliably. Interestingly, I see in the press that home confinement seems to have led to a considerable increase in interest in model railways, on top of which Hornby have been letting us know that their more recent financial results have been more positive than they have been for a good while. This, of course, in the 'Railway Shop' we applaud wholeheartedly.

The majority of British modelling comes in the '00' scale, however one of the things that we've noticed in the shop is the increase of interest in other scales. There has always been a market for 'N' gauge for those with space restraints for their model railway, but more interestingly has seen the recent increase in ready-to-run 'O' gauge models from manufacturers such as Dapol, Minerva and Heljan. I suppose most people's 'O' gauge layouts will have limited running space, but don't the models look fabulous.

Then there is the expansion of the '009' scale stock from the likes of Bachmann and Peco. Here, interesting layouts can be made even in the smallest of spaces. Don't forget that if there are any modelling needs that you have that are not stocked in the shop, we will be only too happy to order them for you. If you can't get to the shop, you can ring us when we are open or e-mail us with your questions.

The problems of 2020 have meant that there has been relatively little in the way of new models from the mainstream '00' gauge manufacturers, however, hopefully by the time you get to read these notes we shall have in stock Dapol's new model of the GWR mogul.



These will be particularly popular among Great Western aficionados as the locos were ubiquitous around their system, indeed straying outside it as well (i.e., Crewe, Basingstoke and up the Great Central). One to look out for.

(submitted by Martin Herbert)



The Railway Shop stocks several exclusive OO gauge wagons including 'Blaenavon' and 'Basil Jayne'
(Mail order available, delivery charges apply.)

Our Railway through Covid-19.

In March 2020 it became clear that the start of the season would need to be postponed and the UK dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic. At this time, we all thought that we would be running trains by June, but as the year went on this became later and later. By the end of July, it looked as if the restrictions would be relaxed enough to allow us to run trains for August Bank Holiday and throughout September.

As we turned our thoughts to running trains it became obvious that some significant changes would be required to make the passenger experience 'Covid secure'. The trains were limited to three per day and with pre-booked compartments. This limited the number of passenger groups to 13. A one-way system was put in place on the station and train and passengers were required to stay on the train for one round trip, removing the flexibility normally offered to them to explore the area.

A significant investment in PPE, sanitiser, cleaning equipment and signage had to be made. Along with a huge campaign on social media and our new website to ensure people knew what to expect.

It has been a challenging year but with the financial and physical support of GOS Engineering, Blaenavon Town Council, Torfaen County Borough Council and in particular our MS Lynne Neagle, the railway has been able to make some significant investment to improve the passenger experience and the appearance of the railway. The return of our three Mk1s from Williton resplendent in carmine and cream livery, the repaint of Empress, completion of the Eric Edwards Carriage Shed and the significant improvements at Blaenavon High Level to name but a few.

Following a great response to the September services we never expected the unprecedented demand faced when our Santa Trains went on sale. To have sold a ticket to everyone in the queue we would have had to run every day in December! The tickets sold out in less than 15 minutes. We look forward to welcoming our passengers in a Covid-secure way on our new Santa experience, all being well.

Submitted by Alex Hinshelwood.

Paul Gane Obituary

One of our long serving volunteers, Paul Gane, sadly passed away on Monday October 26th 2020. Paul was 63.

His bubbly character and sense of humour was infectious, and our volunteers have many happy memories of Paul at the railway, 'on tour' and at various galas and charter trips.



Book that perfect gift today!

Are you looking for a gift for the person who has everything?
or perhaps you'd like to treat yourself?

Why not consider booking a Heritage Railway Experience at
Blaenavon's Heritage Railway?

The Experience, suitable for those aged 18 or over, includes:

- Choice of a **steam** or **diesel** experience
- A full round trip with the **Driver** on the footplate, lasting just over an hour for the participant
- A further full round trip assisting the **Guard**
- A **ticket** for a friend to ride on the train on the same day
- A **certificate** commemorating your special day!

From **£50** per participant! Price includes one guest per participant.

[Book online today by visiting our online store.](#)

Currently unavailable whilst the COVID pandemic restrictions apply.

9629 Pontypool & Blaenavon Locomotive Group

2020 has not been an easy year for all of us and the Locomotive Group is no exception to this. The restoration of GWR Pannier Tank no. 9629 has felt a bit uphill during this year. The focus of the work that has been going on, has two main directions.

Firstly, there is the work undertaken on the frames. This has seen the placement of the cylinder block back into the frames. The repair of this has been a long, expensive but necessary job. The frames of 9629 need to be prepared for the return of the wheels, so the next job has been the refettling of the axle boxes. This is currently in progress, when Covid permits. Looking ahead the springs will need to be sorted and the wheels sent away to be turned and to have their crankpins replaced.



Photo by George Headworth

Secondly, the cab and bunker are being worked on by a small group helping with this locomotive's restoration. This has seen them go on the longest journey they have made for some years as this work is being undertaken on a private site in the south of Gwent. Pannier tanks have a very distinctive look and shape and this should go a long way to give a very visual reminder of the progress on the loco.

A working Pannier Tank would be a most appropriate locomotive to see service on our Railway. Many such engines from Pontypool Road shed would have been seen working up and down our valley on a range of passenger, freight and shunting duties. Indeed, the sound of a Pannier Tank working in the valley continued until sometime after the end of steam on British Railways in 1968. Pannier Tank no. 7754 had been purchased by the National Coal Board and could be seen working in Abersychan at the British site until 1970. Following this it went over to Mountain Ash before being bought by the National Museum of Wales. It now resides on the Heritage Railway in Llangollen.

The Locomotive Group is always looking for support both physical and financial, to speed the day when the Loco is working again. If you fancy the chance of getting involved with the restoration of a GWR locomotive, please feel free to contact anyone in the group or if you like you can always contact us via our email pandblocomotivegroup@googlemail.com.

Submitted by Martin Herbert.



Andy May's photo of his O gauge model of 9629

Barry Railway Carriage 173 (submitted by Mark Vrettos)

I've been unable to get to the railway recently having suffered a stroke but I'm trying to do a few things at home and Richard Evans has been cracking on. He's completed the repairs to the Eastern side, it must have been this side that was exposed to the sea when it was a house in Starcross. He's carried out a lot of major surgery to the frame and the lower he went the rot was worse. At the top it had affected some of the roof hoops, we have already fitted six new ones in the Northern End, and the end around nine to twelve inches needed replacing.

These replacement roof hoop ends would coincide



Photo by Richard Evans

are looking at the covering for the roof and along with the roof top vents.

with the compartment walls being reinstated. This along with the associated roof repairs constituted the completeness of the structure of the carriage. Everything else you could say is parasitic to the structure so we

I personally managed to buy three to go with the two serviceable ones to complete the set, I shall machine up a set of pads to go with them. Richard has been joined by a younger member Ron (84) to help push things along, it's always a big help when members join us working on it, I'm on the lookout for a painter, someone who could follow the woodworkers and do all the prep before painting. The main panels are being prepped, these will need filling and rubbing down as the succession of coats go on, so any volunteers, please let us know. With the structure now solid, attention can turn to the picture panels these form the bases to the luggage rack brackets, the brackets we bought from the S&DRT prior to this. It's important to get the picture panels made as they hold the tops of the seat backs in place, these seat backs will be made to suit the carriage and using as much scavenged seat parts as we can, same goes for the squabs. These will be from some EMU squabs we got from Caerwent they will be sitting on bespoke framework that we shall make ourselves.

Preparations are also in hand to lift the body up so that the chassis can be rolled out, this will allow shortening ready for receiving the body.

Just in case you are wondering what this carriage is all about, Barry No173 has a capacity of 46 people, whereas the GE Saloon is around 24.



Photo by Richard Evans

So, playing the numbers game, you have 173 weighing around 16 Tons with 46 seats and GE 26 tons with 24 seats. I've bought a number of things for expediency to push things along including recently an original Barry Railway Crest, which although is a bit moth eaten but can now be considered as a standard, there's a lot of information on it for us to extract on the ones we need to fit.

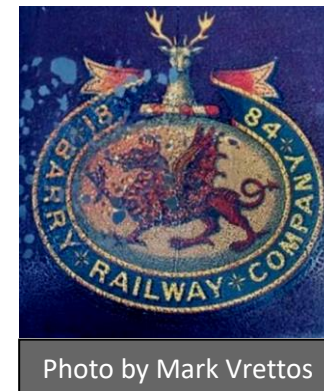


Photo by Mark Vrettos

North London Railway Birdcage Brake

Many may have wondered what the garden shed looking structure is on site, it's a North London Railway Birdcage Brake, or just the Birdcage.

A chassis has now arrived for the carriage which has been a major boost to the project. The North London Railway Carriages came down to South Wales as the routes were electrified and received new stock, one big recipient was Brynmawr for working down our line along with Tredegar and Swansea, One Birdcage identical to ours was photographed at Swansea St Thomas. Two more went to the Big Arch, Talywain and were initially used in the workmen's train, the last of the set ran until approx. 1960. The plan is to accommodate less able visitors and families with buggies, due to it having double doors. It's difficult to accommodate these visitors at the moment so it will probably be called an accessibility coach.

Meet a Manager – Sophie Martin



For those of you who don't yet know me, I'm Sophie (or Soph) and I've been a Member of the railway since 2017.

After living in Cardiff at University for 3 years I then moved to Swansea to work for Amazon. I discovered the P&B railway, joined as a member, became a volunteer and was immediately made to feel welcome.

Over the last few years, I've loved getting to know a lot of volunteers although there are still many I haven't met yet. I grew up with railways living only 15 minutes from the Midland Railway at Butterley, then, when I left home for University, I realised I needed trains in my life again!

I passed my competency assessments as a locomotive cleaner, fireman and guard at the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway and although I now live "Up North", near Durham, I still come down as often as I can.

I'm excited to take on the role of Competency Manager to support the railway and will ensure everyone is aware of their current competencies and that their assessments are accurate and up to date with their training and qualifications for the roles they undertake.

As your Competency Manager I will ensure that all necessary information is aligned to up-to-date HRA Guidance and keep you informed when competencies are due to expire and require renewal.

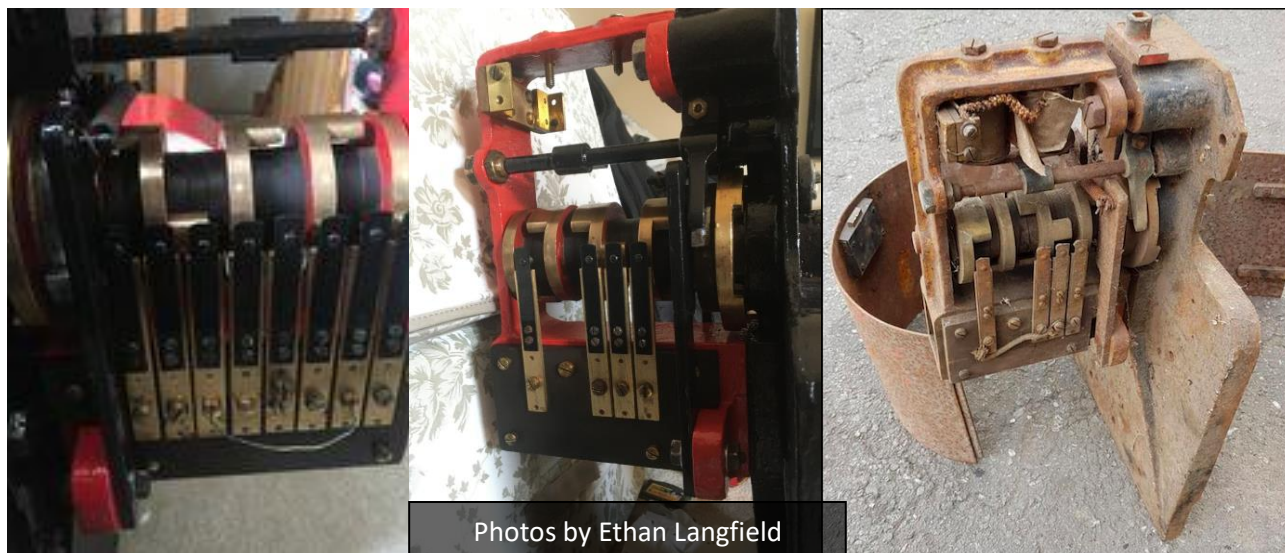
I will be holding the competencies of Rules Book Exams, PTS exams and working with the department managers to ensure accurate competencies of operational volunteers.

Given the current climate I am aware that not everyone will be able to easily access the railway and that more information is being processed and passed on digitally. With this in mind and to ensure that relevant, accurate, up to date, information is recorded, I intend to store all currently held paper documents digitally.

Digital copies of exams/competencies will ensure there are no delays or barriers to anyone who requires access of any information or records.

I will also be reviewing the HRA Medical Guidance to ensure every member of operational staff is appropriately fit to complete the role they are in, for the safety of themselves, volunteers and the public.

I will be contacting every operational volunteer to ensure we have accurate competency details for you. But in the meantime, if you do have any questions please do not hesitate to email me competencies@pbrly.co.uk



These photos show before and after views of the No.9 Token Machine's restoration.
A great improvement that's for sure!

Further to this, and thanks to Alex Hinshelwood, the department had a Number 12 Tyer's token machine donated to us also, for use on the line in the very near future. This machine is complete, it simply requires a light overhaul to bring it back up to standard, which is progressing as this is being written. A huge thank you once again to Alex, without whom this would not have been possible!

The S&T department, has, despite the lockdowns and the added restrictions imposed managed to push forward positively this year.

Over lockdown, and with a lot of time to spare on my part, I set myself the task of finishing the restoration of one of Tyer's No.9 token machines, acquired in July last year from Junction Railwayana in Caldicot. Over the ensuing weeks and months (and many hours of wire-brushing and painting!) the machine slowly came back together, and is mechanically working once again. It still requires some minor work to the coils, and a case needs to be found or made to surround it, but this is now once again a valuable piece of equipment, and something which will no doubt prove a great use to us in the near future.



The newly acquired No. 12 token machine prior to delivery to the department.

Post lockdown, we were able to return to the railway, where we completed the installation of the second set of hand-points for the new carriage sidings. Both points are now installed, and operational, and the team is very proud of its installation. We'd like to take the opportunity to thank Steve Vincent for his help and encouragement throughout this installation.

(Picture right) The newly installed second-hand point on the carriage sidings – complete with a fully repainted and restored hand point lever.



Photo by Ethan Langfield

A refurbished, and restored BRWR Ground Signal is very close to emerging from our signalling works at Blaenavon. This signal will be instrumental in our upcoming plans to introduce a new 10 lever ground frame, which will see the introduction of two ground signals (acting initially as Point Indicators) to control the exit of the deviation and the carriage sidings frame, as well as combining the control over the point-works for the deviation, crossover and carriage sidings. A full plan and break down on the scheme will hopefully appear in the next edition. Meanwhile, work on this new frame has begun, and completed components are also beginning to emerge from our department. We hope that at some point during the new year we'll be able to start assembling this new frame, and then begin the preparation of the next phase towards its installation.

Work has also been ongoing in acquiring new contacts, and in doing so new equipment for the department also. We were recently grateful recipients of several upper quadrant castings and signal arms from the Severn Valley Railway, who (as they predominately use lower quadrant GWR/BR WR signalling) had no use for these components, and offered them to us for donation. A huge thanks to the S&T team at the Valley. We are very excited now to be in a position where we have contacts with one of the largest preserved railways in the UK!

So, whilst S&T may not be in quite the same position that we hoped it would be in this year, we have still come out of this in a far stronger position, and are really starting to make some fantastic progress that will benefit the railway greatly moving forward. Much more is of course happening behind the scenes, and we can't wait to share this progress and information with you soon! But for the moment I hope we have managed to stir your interests, and demonstrate the fantastic potential that our fantastic team of S&T volunteers have to offer to the railway.



Work progressing on a numerous components. These are just a sample of the different bits and pieces we are restoring for forthcoming projects.



Photos by Ethan Langfield



No 18 'Jessie' arrives back at Furnace Siding on the last train of the 2020 season on Saturday 26th September.
Photo by Thomas Coombes.

Report from The Steam Department
Submitted by Alex Gourlay

2020 has been a strange year for us all, and the steam locomotives have seen significantly less use than normal. It has also meant that both our volunteer resources and contractors have not been around as much, this has slowed several things down. Hopefully things will begin to return closer to normal for us next year!

Andrew Barclay Rosyth No. 1

Boiler exams and winter maintenance which included the overhaul of the reversing lever, die blocks, and expansion links was completed for mid-march by West Somerset Restoration at Williton. And the locomotive was ready for a planned visit to our friends at the Avon Valley Railway on March 21 & 22 for their mixed traffic industrial gala. The loco arrived at Bittern just before lockdown and unfortunately the event was cancelled at the last minute due to coronavirus restrictions. The loco returned to Blaenavon the following week. It was then 'winterised' until we reopened in September and since then has operated our re-opening trains, a photo charter and Santa specials.

Hunslet 1873 Jessie

Boiler exams and winter maintenance were all but complete when lockdown was imposed, as with Rosyth this led the loco to be winterised again. A steam test with our boiler inspector took place in mid-September allowing the loco to re-enter traffic to operate our last couple of services later that month along with the Santa specials.

Bagnall 3061 Empress

As with Jessie the boiler exams and winter maintenance were all but complete when lockdown came, leading the loco to be winterised again. Due to the limited number of running days the loco has not re-entered traffic. The loco has received a fresh coat of Oxford blue paint during the late summer months to freshen up its appearance in readiness for the 2021 season.



Andrew Barclay 2074 Llantarnam Abbey

Some progress has been made with the overhaul of brake gear and making pins for the spring hangers in recent months and we are currently working towards refitting the running plates. The board have recently approved work on the chassis and for this the frames will be sent to West Somerset Restoration at Williton. This will see a complete rolling chassis when it returns to us in around 18 months' time.

RSH Austerity 71515 Mech Navvies

The tank, cab and chimney have now been lifted off the locomotive, this then allowed the removal of the boiler cladding and crinolines. The removal of the boiler is now imminent and will facilitate the non-destructive testing on the boiler and assessment to ascertain what will be required to return the locomotive to traffic.



Departures

The first departure was privately owned Smith & Rodley Steam crane which left us for a private site in Exmoor on 28th November. Sentinel 9622 Swansea Vale No. 1 and Andrew Barclay 2201 Victory will also depart in the New Year. Both of these locomotives were offered for sale following a stock review and bids have recently been accepted for both locomotives.



In Memory of Bernard Powell Morton 1934 - 2020 by Andy May

As the year draws to a close, I thought it would be fitting to remember a departed friend and long-time member of our railway.

I first got to know Bernard through "Going Loco" a model shop in Newport where I used to do repairs for customers in the late 80's. He was one of the regular visitors at the time, he would often talk about the PBR and eventually persuaded me to join. Over the years he encouraged me and several others to progress through the grades on the footplate.

Bernard lived and breathed railways and not only was he a member of the PBR he also was a member of the Dean Forest Railway, I remember popping over to Lydney Junction with my dad to have a day shunting as Bernard was driving "Charlie" the resident 08 shunting loco also our good friend Huw Morgan was there as shunter, was an interesting day on another railway. On the day I was due to do my drivers exam for steam Bernard was supervising and Ron Voyle was examined, John Bell was in charge of the loco and Roger Lewis was guard. As we were about to depart the east sidings Bernard called us on but had not pulled the catch point, Roger realising this applied the emergency brake but it was too late and front wheel set was in the dirt! Luckily, we got it back on the rails and all the exams went well eventually.

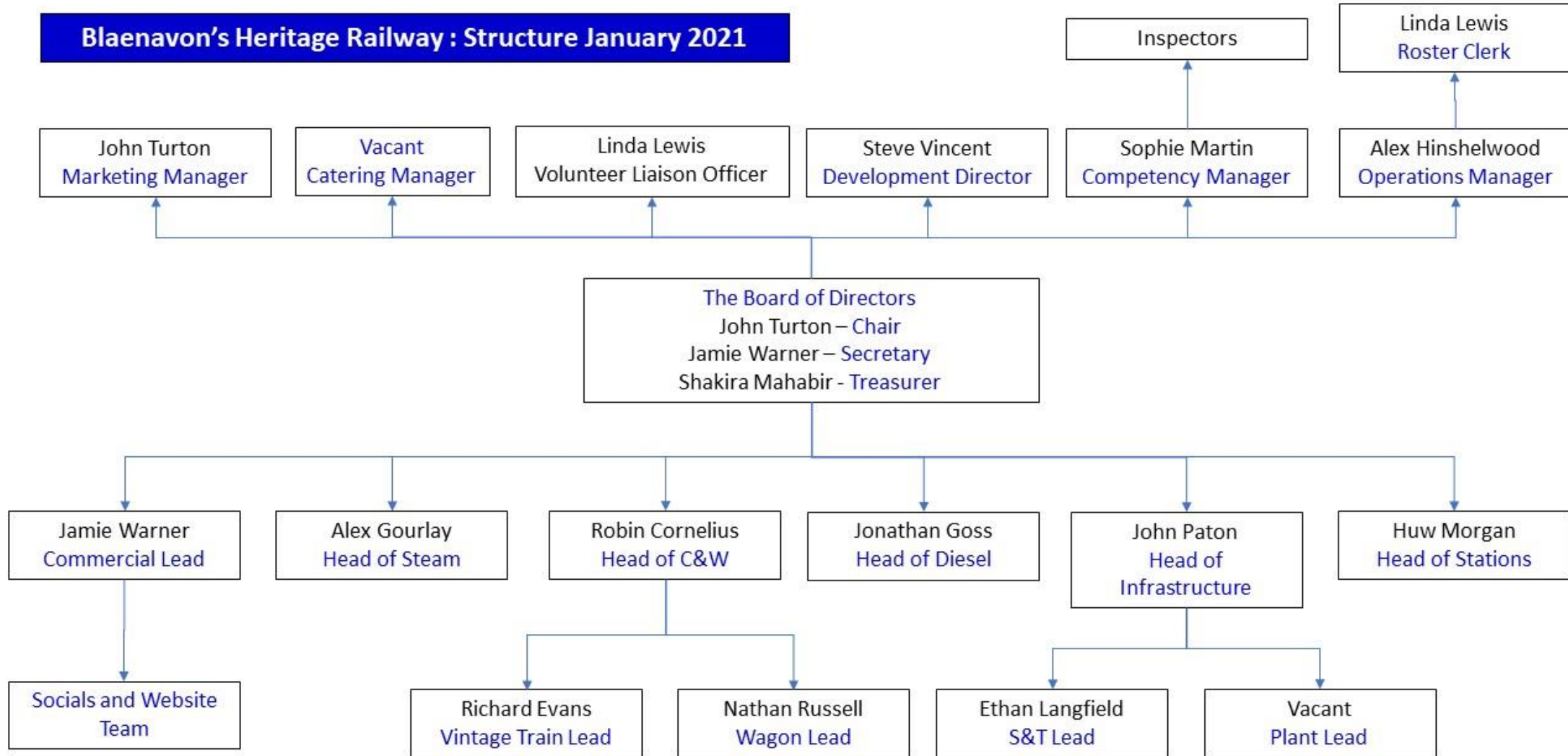
Over the years myself and Bernard served on both company board and society, although many a heated discussion at some of the meetings he was always cool headed.

Bernard was a great friend and came on several visits to gala days at various railways around the country with "The Severn Tunnel Steamers", a group founded by myself and Peter Payne. On these trips Bernard would reflect on bygone days of the railways, being the same age as my dad they got on well on these trips and enjoyed a chat over a pint.

I can honestly say that Bernard was a great person to know and was always a pleasure to be in his company. He is truly missed.



Blaenavon's Heritage Railway : Structure January 2021



Note: the Safety Management System is the responsibility of the relevant Head/Manager with the Board accountable.



Diesel Traction Department (Submitted by Jonathon Goss and Richard Arthur)

A review of Diesel Fleet nearing the end of what has to be said is one of the strangest years experienced thus far.

Mainliners:

31203:

Since having the 2 Pistons removed, new cylinder liners and reassembly the loco has run reasonably clean and faultless. This year however with the lack of use the loco is starting to throw some toys out. We have had leaking windows, leaking radiators, seizing apparatus. Nevertheless, the team have battled on. Cab 2 has had all the windows seals replaced and is undergoing an internal overhaul. The left-hand louver overhaul has been finished and the louvers re-fitted. The leaking radiator has had its seals replaced and checked. Externally, cab one buffer beam has been processed and Painted along with the panel around the recently overhauled louvers. Attention now turns to the motors and braking system whilst we have access to a pit. Following that we will be looking to address the bodywork section by section.

37216:

Having been removed from the shed the loco has undergone a few initial exams whilst fault finding. Current challenge is addressing seized and leaking valves. Once these are corrected then a full exam will be undertaken to ensure the loco can be used for rescue and shunting if required. The loco has also allowed us to help the mainline, being a parts donor to keep the mainline locos running, we in return received known good equipment, removed and re-installed by them also. The owner wants the loco in-service ASAP.

37023

It has been over a year now since the Class 37, 37023, arrived at the Railway and apart from looking cleaner and less covered in algae it appears to be abandoned and unloved. However, this is far from the case. The arrival of the loco to our site brought with it some urgent maintenance work as the owner had previously removed the braking system while overhauling the bogies. This included the handbrakes. Three volunteers, Rich, Steve and Dan, were looking for some work and decided to have a go at rebuilding the handbrake linkages to keep the 101-ton loco safe and secure. Knowing nothing about diesel locos of any class, this operation went surprisingly well and started them on a project that has now kept them happy for hundreds of hours. 37023 arrived with a set of 12 overhauled brake cylinders and a box of various pins, rods and clips. Using 37216 as a pattern, it was decided to sort all the parts into some sensible order and attach them to the bogies, hopefully in the right place. A few damaged brake pipes were renewed or replaced and the braking system was then ready for testing. Using the diesel road compressor, the main reservoir was charged up to 90 psi but this was soon shut down as there were more pipes missing inside the loco on the control air system. Escaping air at that pressure makes an incredible noise! With more new pipes fitted, the system held the pressure well and all 12 brake cylinders operated as required from the driver's straight air brake handle. Another success.

Less technical work followed on from the brakes including moving unwanted parts from inside the loco to storage, tidying and cleaning both the cabs and refitting the radiator louvres to keep out the Blaenavon rain. The inside was starting to look quite impressive.



37023. Photo by Richard Arthur

The engine and generator of 37023 are well and truly shot and the owner's goal is to remove them as one unit and replace with a refurbished unit to give the loco a fresh lease of life. The already steep learning curve ramped up when the three volunteers agreed to speed up the engine replacement operation by removing all the pipes, valves and fittings around the engine. The generator was already disconnected. Our friendly and experienced contractor Mal visited the site and indicated which parts needed to be disconnected from the engine. These included water pipes, fuel pipes, oil pipes, exhaust stacks, control air pipes and the drive shaft coupling to the cooling fan. The drive shaft proved to be extremely difficult, as did the 16 enormous engine mounting bolts.

The next job was not at all technical but it turned out to be the most difficult. This was the removal of the 20 roof bolts. The one-inch AF nuts and bolts had been undisturbed for decades and all of them put up a good fight at the thought of being removed. Socket extension bars, disc cutters, drills, air hack saws and nut splitters managed to removed 14 of them but the other 6 needed a secret weapon: Roger with an oxy acetylene torch. They didn't stand a chance! In preparation for receiving the roof, the Weltrol wagon to the south of 37023 was set up with a pair of scaffolding poles spanning the well so that the roof will hang over them from its apex in order to retain its curved shape.



The final part to be removed before engine removal is the cooling water header tank. All of the rusted nuts and bolts have been taken out but the tank cannot be lifted up until the roof has been removed.

At the time of writing in November 2020, the roof has been prised up from the loco frame and is sitting on wooden spacers ready to be lifted away by crane. The water tank can follow straight after the roof. A timber joist is waiting to be used to span the roof void and a tarpaulin is ready to hang over the joist and will be firmly secured to the loco sides with ropes. The owner has indicated that the replacement generator has been fully overhauled and is waiting to be connected up to the refurbished V12 English Electric unit as soon as the engine work is complete.

By the time you read this, the roof will hopefully be sitting somewhere dry at ground level being prepared and painted ready for refitting on the loco with new nuts and bolts. The 37023 project, and the three volunteers, are very much still alive and are looking forward to pressing the starter button on the refurbished diesel unit sometime during 2021.

Industrials:

1344



1344. Photo by Richard Arthur

In between working on the other projects, our busy Hudswell Clarke 0-4-0 shunter, 1344, has also been receiving attention. Not a renovation project this time but on-going maintenance to keep the little workhorse running and reliable.

A successful improvement to ensure reliable starting was to install an intelligent battery charger permanently wired to the batteries. The dynamo output isn't high enough at engine idle speed to provide a charge and this modification has enabled easy battery charging from the mains. Putting the loco on charge one day a week has meant that it has never failed to start when required for duty. Other work on the electrical side was to fix all the external lights and to get the engine oil pressure gauge working again as this gauge was considered to be the most important. The other gauges will be replaced or repaired in due course.

A temporary repair to the four sanders has made a big improvement to driving the loco on wet rails at substantial gradients. Further permanent work on the sanders is to be carried out later. Thorough checks on all fluid levels and to its general condition has improved overall reliability.

A big thank you goes out to Jon, Matt, Sam, Hugh, Scott and Thomas for their advice and assistance on the Diesel Traction Department work.

5511:

The reliable loco even though the lack of service has never failed to start. Sadly, one day it struggled to return from its meander to High level with a works train. Upon investigation it was found that the Fuel delivery pressures were not quite in tolerance and well, the spray pattern from the Injectors was something more like a droplet than a spray. To think that we thought all was well, when in fact it was merely running on two maybe three cylinders efficiently. The loco has since had a good amount of funds invested into the Fuel delivery, Injection pump and Injectors. These have now been overhauled and re-installed, the loco is currently having a Service of the engine followed by lifting to address a lack of lubrication of the rods. We look forward to seeing this loco back in action in 2021, sounding healthy and having more power.

7063:

To look at, maybe not a lot seems to have changed, but looks can be deceiving.

No.1 Engine is still mothballed whilst focus is on getting the loco working on the running No.2 Engine.

No.1 end basic electrics have been inspected and rewired where needed. No.1 end torque converter which was contracted out for overhaul has returned and has already been swapped out for No.2 Torque converter which now awaits dispatch to be overhauled itself. The braking side of the pneumatic system has had a full overhaul. The underside and outer left chassis have been cosmetically overhauled and all the pneumatics and safety systems reinstalled. A pair of wheels and the respective rods have been cosmetically overhauled. Four hand rails were contracted out, these being that of the ends and both side rails for No.1 end. Focus is now on the drive train and cooling of, with a view to seeing it move under its own power in 2021.

22497:

RT1 has returned under new ownership, the owners have been progressing the loco at a good rate, though never the less it is a long-term project. We wish them all the best of luck and support with the project.

1387:

This loco is now under new ownership and will shortly be leaving us for pastures new.

Multiple Units

117418 D.M.U.

In order to provide some light relief from the heavy work on the Class 37, Rich, Steve and Dan decided to have a go at getting the diesel multiple unit running again. Knowing nothing about diesel railcars of any class they set about researching and learning as much as possible to find out how the units work. A wealth of information was found on the Railcar.co.uk web site and in the 1962 British Railways Diesel Traction Manual for Enginemen book.

All that was known about 117 was that the north car, 51397, had been used as a Halloween coach and had one working engine and the south car, 51351 had been stripped out ready for renovation.

Concentrating on car 51397 it was found that the batteries were in a very poor condition. Jonathan bought a pair of new batteries that immediately improved the starting of engine No 1. Pressing the starter button on engine No 2 gave no voltage across the starter solenoid.

This was traced to a broken wire and once replaced the engine turned over and fired up first time. With both British United Traction L Type engines purring away, the compressors quickly brought the control air up to operating switched through their sequence operating the throttle control motors, 4 speed gearboxes and the reversers of both engines.

The next focus was the vacuum system, which interestingly has a brake pipe circuit and a high vacuum brake release circuit. Creating the vacuum was very poor initially but tests on the exhausters showed that they were drawing about 26 ins of Hg in throttle notch 1. The problem was eventually traced to a number of leaking valves and pipes and also to a faulty AWS. It also helped knowing how the brake system was designed to work. It took many hours to rectify but it was a great success to have the braking system operational again, including the handbrake.

It was not possible to start either engine on car 51351 as there were various components missing. Both cars of 117 418 were coupled together and the brake pipe vacuum hoses connected up in order to test the brakes on 51351.



117 418. Photo by Richard Arthur

A quick vacuum hose change and the brakes on both cars were working on all bogies from the driver's brake handle on 51397. The direct inlet valve in the cab of 51351 also applied the brakes but the vacuum had to be recreated from the other car.

The only remaining job on the DMU now is to take it for a spin up to the Whistle Inn and back to find out if all the technical repairs actually work, and of course to put a smile on people's faces.

On track Plant - was moved under P-way

Giesmar EG04 No.97/17 (aka. The Awruga)

Had all of its brake components re-installed, less a key item that was still being located. The engine was run up and inspected along with inspection of the Deadman's and brakes, the then vehicle took a short trundle up and down the delivery road before being Side lined whilst the seating arrangement was addressed and the key item sought out.

Wickham 6947 (PWM 3962)

The year fell as the planning and funding of the project also hit the target line. And as a result, the Wickham was catapulted from a stored and rotting vehicle to a nearly finished and running project. A new Chassis, a working engine removed from a donor vehicle (Ford Popular/ Anglia Van), all the bodywork has been overhauled, new glazing, bearings, bushes, the list goes on. Currently the vehicle is awaiting the installation of a water pump prior to having the engine run up within the chassis, a new forward reverse lever is required to allow this box to function, nevertheless it is planned to have this vehicle in a useable state for mid-2021 if not sooner.

Vacancy at the Railway (January 2021)

Interested parties please email secretary@pbrly.co.uk to register your interest

Catering Manager

This post will be responsible for the management of the tearoom, catering volunteers and future catering activity (such as on train catering).

The Catering Manager would be expected to maintain the current 5* food hygiene rating and develop the catering offerings across all aspects of the railway.



High Level Station Development

Over the past few months work has steadily progressed at Blaenavon High Level with the installation of a new picket fence on Platform 1 in addition to 3 new lamp post columns. The lamp post light units will only be used on special occasions, when the station is manned, to reduce the risk of damage and theft.

Great strides have been made cutting down the overgrown foliage opposite the station in the former railway yard. This has greatly improved the look of the site and now makes it look cared for. In addition, the team of volunteers have, with great effort, made good progress in cutting back the vegetation on the embankments at High Level station. This has greatly improved visibility at the station approach.

For safety reasons trees and vegetation have also been cut back at Coed Avon, resulting in improved visibility of the level crossing and also reducing the risk of scratching the freshly painted coach stock.

All this has been achieved by a dedicated group of volunteers without whom this would have been impossible, so many thanks to all who helped.

As Phil Tiley has stood down from his role of Board Chairman and other roles I have been approached and accepted the position of Head of Stations. I will be putting together a list of priorities and planning a course of action to upgrade and improve all of our stations. If anyone is interested in helping with this, no matter how large or small your contribution, then please do not hesitate to contact me as there will be many jobs to be completed and, as the old saying goes, many hands make light work.

Many thanks,
Huw Morgan.



Photos by Huw Morgan



Photo by Steve Vincent

This picture shows local Brynmawr haulier Peter Hatton collecting a large quantity of 2" thick paving slabs from Cardiff Bay today which have now been delivered to Furnace Sidings.

These will allow us to install them on the other platform at Blaenavon High Level and hopefully finish off the surface and also allow us to replace the missing fencing.

We would welcome anyone who would like to assist with this work and help us restore another piece of the history of the line. It will be great to see two trains standing at the platforms here again after so many years!

Then and Now

(submitted by Huw Morgan)

Compare the two 1973 photos on the left, taken by Alastair Warrington, with the two taken in 2020, taken by Huw Morgan.

Many changes have taken place over the years, none more so than the condition of the metalwork on the bridge over Varteg Road.

The bottom two show the pedestrian approach to High Level station.

They clearly show what the work, recently undertaken, has achieved, restoring both locations the back to the condition of how they once looked.



Welcome to the first **‘Notes from the Board’** column.

In this feature, the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company Secretary will share updates covering the latest news and decisions that are being taken by the Board of Directors.

As we leave 2020 behind us and look forward to the more promising times ahead in 2021, the Board would like to thank all members and volunteers for the continued support that you have shown over the last year. Although it has been a difficult period for so many of us, together, not only have you helped our little railway to weather the worst of the pandemic, you have equally enabled it to go forward in an even stronger position than before. Throughout the year it was clear that your efforts have been appreciated by so many people. Not only have we received countless comments praising you for what you do, but numerous others have also remarked upon just how impressive and inspiring it has been to see such dedicated supporters rising to whatever the World has thrown against them. It has been no small achievement, and it is one that you should be very proud of indeed.

After the national lockdown of the spring and early summer, your support (financial, voluntary and/or just general well-wishes) enabled us to resume operations in a COVID-secure way on weekends throughout the late August and September. With the railway boasting a fresh look thanks to the newly repainted Mark 1s in their striking Crimson and Cream livery (made possible through your donations), passenger numbers and feedback exceeded all expectations.

Although further general lockdown restrictions prevented us from operating our Halloween Ghost Trains, at Christmas we once rose to the challenge of operating COVID-secure Steam Santa Special services. Despite the potential issues posed by the move to an entirely on-train, socially distanced experience, we once again exceeded all expectations. Trains sold out in record time, and we received unprecedented positive feedback from passengers.

Of course, the above is by no means the whole story. After the hiatus of the spring lockdown, behind the scenes work has continued throughout the year. Whether it be the substantial completion of the carriage shed, improvement works at Blaenavon High Level, or the ongoing restoration and routine maintenance of our heritage assets, we are continuing to develop a heritage railway that we can all be proud of. The Board cannot thank you enough for your continued support in making this happen.

To conclude this edition, the Board would like to summarise the outcome of its 2020 AGM. Mr Richard Evans, Mrs Linda Lewis, Mr Steve Vincent and Mr Jamie Warner have now been elected Directors, with Mr Warner also being chosen to become the Company’s Secretary following his tenure as Interim Secretary. In a change to the published agenda sent to members, Mr Phil Tiley subsequently decided that he wished to step down as a Director. In doing so, he has resigned the position of Chair, which Mr John Turton has kindly agreed to take on.

On behalf of all members, the Board would like to pay tribute to Mr Tiley for his hard work and dedication in the role since taking the position in 2013. Although Phil will also be stepping down from his role as Head of Stations, he has informed us that he will be continuing in his Guard-related duties and will remain a valued member of our railway for many years to come. Moving forward into 2021, the Board has exciting plans for the future of our little railway. Please keep reading future ‘Notes from the Board’ columns for further details.

Jamie Warner,
Secretary, The Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company (1983) Limited.



We hope you have enjoyed the first edition of the electronic Bottom Line newsletter.

It is hoped this will be produced on a bi-monthly basis so the next issue will be March 2021.

**If you have any PBR related stories or anecdotes you would like to have included then please forward them to:
steve.thomas@pbrlyco.uk
by no later than February 20th 2021.**

Items submitted may be edited to fit in available space.



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